United Nations E/CN.5/2017/7

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
13 December 2016

Original: English

Commission for Social Development
Fifty-fifth session
1-10 February 2017
Item 3 (c) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly

Emerging issues: promoting integrated policies for poverty eradication: youth development in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Note by the Secretariat

I. Introduction

1. Pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/18, the programme of work of the Commission for Social Development has included the agenda item "Emerging issues" since its 2007-2008 review and policy cycle. Under this agenda item, the Commission addresses current issues affecting social development that require urgent consideration and new cross-cutting issues in the context of evolving global development challenges. In selecting the theme in recent years, the Bureau of the Commission has also taken into full consideration the annual themes of the Economic and Social Council in order to better align the work of the Commission with that of the Council, as called for in General Assembly resolution 68/1. At its fifty-fifth session, the Commission will consider under that agenda item the question of "Promoting integrated policies for poverty eradication: youth development in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". The present note has been prepared to provide background information for the discussion of the topic.

2. The present note focuses on some specific areas that are important for promoting integrated policies for poverty eradication in the context of youth development in the 2030 Agenda, in which the Commission could play a leading role. It also explores how the Commission could provide guidance on the effective implementation of youth policies and their links to the 2030 Agenda. It should be read in conjunction with the report of the Secretary-General on policies and

* E/CN.5/2017/1.

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programmes involving youth (E/CN.5/2017/5) and a similar note, prepared for the fiftieth session of the Commission, on youth, poverty and unemployment (E/CN.5/2012/8).

3. Youth development is a key driver of sustainable development and poverty eradication around the world. Young people should acquire the education and skills needed to contribute to a productive economy, and they need access to a job market that can absorb them into the labour force. Among the greatest challenges facing many countries today are inadequate human capital investment and high unemployment rates among youth. Some countries are struggling to educate and employ their young people, while also anticipating substantial growth in the number of youth. Those countries will be doubly challenged in their efforts to assure universal high-quality education, productive employment and decent work for all.

4. Against that background, the Bureau of the Commission chose "Promoting integrated policies for poverty eradication: youth development in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" as the emerging issues topic of the Commission at its fifty-fifth session, which also echoes the theme of the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council for 2017. The selection of that topic acknowledges that the manner in which the 2030 Agenda is translated into national policies and strategies and implemented and monitored will play a key role in its success in terms of promoting inclusion and participation and in advancing a comprehensive vision of social development.

II. Poverty eradication through implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

5. At the United Nations summit held in September 2015, the General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda is a universal, transformative and people-centred plan of action to collectively work towards achieving sustainable development for current and future generations, through the integration of its social, economic and environmental dimensions in a balanced manner.

6. The 2030 Agenda continues to place the eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions at the centre of global development, while placing greater emphasis on an integrated approach to sustainable development and the pledge to leave no one behind. It provides a new context for the promotion of social development, namely as an integral component in the implementation of the commitments to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

7. Several priorities for youth development were specifically identified in the 2030 Agenda. This has increased the need for the development, implementation and monitoring of robust, innovative and progressive youth policies in order to achieve the Goals. Youth policies provide a framework for the implementation of the Goals and enable young people to fulfil their potential as active members of society.

8. The World Programme of Action for Youth, adopted by the General Assembly in 1995, provides a policy framework and practical guidelines for national action

and international support to improve the situation of young people around the world. The Programme of Action covers 15 youth priority areas and contains proposals for action in each of those areas, including through the development of national youth policies.

9. Since the adoption of the Programme of Action, Member States have developed, revised and implemented national youth strategies and policies. During the high-level event of the President of the General Assembly to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the World Programme of Action for Youth, held on 29 May 2015, Member States highlighted their efforts in utilizing the Programme of Action in the development and realization of national youth policies, in particular those concerning youth employment. Those efforts reflect the commitments of Member States, including as indicated most recently in Assembly resolution 70/127, in which the Assembly reiterated:

> The primary responsibility for implementing the World Programme of Action for Youth lies with Member States, and urges Governments, in consultation with youth and youth-led and youth-focused organizations and other relevant stakeholders, to develop holistic and integrated youth policies and programmes based on the Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to evaluate them regularly as part of the follow-up action on and implementation of the Programme of Action at all levels.

III. Poverty eradication through the development, implementation and monitoring of national youth policies

10. The effective development, implementation and monitoring of youth policies play a critical role in poverty eradication and in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. However, to date there has been limited implementation of national youth policies and, where youth policies do exist, they are often implemented in a vacuum, without consideration of other public policies, and lack appropriate financing.

11. To ensure their effective implementation, youth policies must be developed and implemented in conjunction with other public policies that affect the lives of youth and must be adequately financed. Doing so requires the development and implementation of cross-sectoral and integrated policy frameworks and the alignment of youth policies with regional and global development frameworks, in particular the 2030 Agenda and the Programme of Action. In addition, policies should be developed and implemented based on sound empirical evidence and rigorous scientific analysis and should involve young people in their development, implementation and monitoring, where feasible.

A. Evidence-based youth policymaking

12. Evidence-based youth policymaking ensures that youth policies are developed in a robust and effective manner through the use of quantitative and qualitative statistics and data, scientific knowledge and practical knowledge. Such evidence helps deepen the understanding of the current status of young people and translates

data, experience and knowledge into appropriate and successful strategies and policies for young people. At the fifty-first session of the Commission, the Secretary-General proposed a set of indicators related to the Programme of Action. The indicators, which were developed at the request of Member States, provide a tool to better assess the situation of youth and thereby contribute to more effective youth policymaking.

B. Youth participation in policy and decision-making

13. Ensuring the participation of young people in the design, development, implementation and monitoring of youth policies is central to ensuring their effectiveness. From open consultations, youth advisory boards and youth-led processes and partnerships, a range of methods to involve young people in youth policymaking exist among Member States. In particular, efforts to promote the participation of girls, young women and marginalized youth have a positive impact on the effectiveness of youth policies.

IV. Role of youth policies in addressing poverty

14. As emphasized in the 2030 Agenda, efforts to end poverty should address not only income but also the structural causes of poverty. Structural causes of poverty include: a lack of or limited access to education, health care and other basic services; inadequate access to food, nutrition, energy, housing and safe environments; unequal access to land and other productive assets, credit, inheritance, information, knowledge and technologies; a lack of opportunities for decent work and participation; and social discrimination and exclusion.

15. Certain groups of young people are particularly vulnerable to poverty and deprivation, including girls and young women, youth with disabilities, indigenous youth, young migrants and rural youth. Youth policies should, therefore, include measures to carefully analyse and remove the structural barriers encountered by youth, in particular those faced by the most vulnerable and disadvantaged youth, so that they can escape the cycle of poverty.

16. With respect to poverty eradication and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, it is critical to (a) promote decent jobs for all; (b) ensure gender equality and the empowerment of girls and young women; and (c) promote the inclusion of the most marginalized youth through targeted youth policy measures.

A. Youth employment

17. Productive employment and decent work, if adequately remunerated, are effective pathways out of poverty and provide access to social protection, guarantee workplace rights and provide opportunities for social dialogue. Decent work also promotes social inclusion, dignity, participation, motivation and engagement and aids in the realization of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth. For people living in poverty, decent jobs also enhance their health, nutrition and quality of life.

18. Young people are disproportionately affected by unemployment, underemployment, vulnerable employment and working poverty. Even during periods of robust economic growth, the labour market is often unable to assimilate large numbers of youth. In recent years, the situation has been exacerbated by the lingering effects of the global financial and economic crisis, with declining numbers of youth able to find decent work. Recent estimates indicate that 71 million youth, or close to 13 per cent of all young people worldwide, were unemployed in 2016.[1]

19. Given the current rates of population growth, it is expected that 470 million jobs will need to be created globally to absorb the growing number of new entrants into the labour market between 2016 and 2030.[2] This is of particular concern for countries affected by the so-called "youth bulge". Evidence shows that having a large number of unemployed youth increases social tensions and threatens social cohesion.

20. Although joblessness is a concern in almost all countries, in low- and middle-income countries, a particular challenge is posed by the large numbers of youth who, working irregularly in the informal sector, cannot escape working poverty. This is particularly true for young women. It is estimated that, in 2013, 286 million employed youth were living on less than $4 per day, and 169 million were subsisting on less than $2 per day.[3]

21. The 2008 economic and financial crisis reinforced the long-term downward trend in youth labour market participation rates. Crisis-induced increases in youth unemployment would have been greater had many young workers not dropped out of the labour market. While some youth may have returned to the education system, the share of those who were neither in employment nor in education or training increased in 30 of the 40 countries for which data were available for 2007 and from 2011 to 2012.[4] This severe waste of human potential can have drastic repercussions in terms of marginalization and exclusion both for the young people affected and for societies at large.[5]

22. Given the persistent exclusion of some children and youth from the education system, combined with global trends in youth unemployment and changes in labour markets owing to technological advancement, the provision of inclusive and equitable high-quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all is of great importance. Such education is essential for ensuring that youth obtain not only basic skills, but also livelihood skills to support their transition from school to work.[5]

23. The exclusion of youth from the labour market is of particular concern because of its long-term effect on well-being and its impact on social cohesion and stability. For every young person, a decent job is an important step in completing the

[1] International Labour Organization (ILO), *World Employment Social Outlook: Trends for Youth 2016* (International Labour Office, Geneva, 2016).

[2] United Nations Development Group, "Growth and employment in the post-2015 agenda".

[3] ILO, "*Global Employment Trends for Youth 2015: scaling up investments in decent jobs for youth*", (International Labour Office, Geneva, 2015).

[4] ILO, *Global Employment Trends 2014: risk of a jobless recovery?* (International Labour Office, Geneva, 2014).

[5] *Report on the World Social Situation 2016: leaving no one behind: the imperative of inclusive development* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.16.IV.1).

transition to adulthood and a milestone towards achieving independence and self-reliance. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), given that more than 40 per cent of the world's active youth are either unemployed or working but living in poverty, the financial and economic crisis of 2008 has led to a "lost generation" of young people who have lost all hope of being able to work for a decent living. Not only do unemployment and underemployment affect young people's material, physical and mental well-being, they also hamper their future economic opportunities. Research shows that joblessness among youth is associated with lower wages and lower labour market participation later in life. Joblessness also leaves its mark in the form of young people's distrust in political, social and economic systems. Indeed, protests and other expressions of social unrest have been particularly acute in countries and regions where youth unemployment is widespread or has been rising rapidly over the past decade.[5]

24. Supporting the economic participation of educated and skilled young people can be a driving force for sustained and inclusive economic growth and political stability. With more than 87 per cent of the world's youth living in developing countries, efforts to address employment challenges must not only generate more job opportunities for young people, but also improve the quality of work and working conditions. Engaging young people in productive activities and addressing their needs and concerns are therefore critical to achieving sustained and inclusive growth and enhancing social stability. The links between youth employment, skills development, green jobs and social protection as part of the transition to a greener economy should be examined further.

25. To address the persistent youth unemployment and underemployment challenge, a number of Member States have developed targeted youth employment policies and strategies aimed at promoting job creation and strengthening youth skills development and training. In many cases, actions aimed at combating youth unemployment and underemployment constitute a central element of national youth policies, strategies and plans.

26. Policies aimed at tackling the structural causes of the lack of employment opportunities for young people have often focused on increasing their employability by improving their access to and the quality of formal education, apprenticeships and other vocational programmes and by reducing the mismatch between the skills acquired and those needed in the labour market. Some countries have also focused on promoting youth entrepreneurship by providing youth with financial literacy training, credit and microfinancing.

27. Such policy measures have been most effective when integrated into policy frameworks that promote employment more broadly. However, such policies often fail to specifically target more vulnerable and marginalized youth, including youth living in poverty and those at risk of exclusion, including indigenous youth, youth with disabilities and rural youth.

28. The Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, launched under ILO leadership, is a joint effort of 19 United Nations entities that brings together Governments, social partners, parliamentarians, the private sector, youth representatives and civil society in an effort to increase the impact of evidence-based interventions, knowledge partnerships and multi-stakeholder partnerships at the country level. Such joint efforts are necessary in order to maximize the

effectiveness of investments in youth employment and will contribute to the implementation of the youth employment-related Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda.

B. Gender inequality and the empowerment of girls and young women

29. Girls and young women are more likely than young men to experience barriers to their full and effective participation in society, for example, in gaining access to quality education, employment and health care. Young women are also likely to be excluded from decision-making and experience low levels of participation in public life. Such exclusion increases a young woman's likelihood of experiencing and remaining in poverty.

30. Combating negative gender stereotypes, systemic barriers and societal behaviours are critical aspects of developing the conditions for the participation of young women and the advancement of gender equality. In accordance with the Programme of Action, involving both young women and young men in policy development can ensure that the resulting policies advance gender equality and are better positioned to alter the attitudes and behaviours that can hinder the advancement of girls and young women.

31. Measures to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment can be meaningfully implemented when adequate funding is put in place, including through the apportionment of dedicated budgets to implement gender-specific policies and the allocation of gender-responsive budgets to finance non-gender-specific policies.

C. Marginalized youth

32. Marginalization can affect the ability of young people to meaningfully participate in the social, economic, cultural and political spheres of society and in decision-making that affects them, and can greatly affect their life-long propensity to experience poverty. In particular, indigenous youth, youth in rural areas, youth with disabilities and young migrants, may be at greater risk of poverty, marginalization and social exclusion.

33. Integrated youth policies that attend to the needs of marginalized youth and address the societal conditions that lead to vulnerability, poverty and social exclusion, can help ensure the visibility of marginalized youth, reduce inequalities and supply the tools and skills required for them to have a positive impact in their own lives and their communities. Policies established to support young people, in particular the poor and the marginalized, are necessary in order to remove the additional systemic and institutional obstacles that limit their contributions and to ensure that their full potential is realized.

34. The participation of youth from marginalized groups as stakeholders in youth policymaking and participatory processes helps to ensure the effectiveness of policy development and poverty eradication.

35. The comprehensive social inclusion of marginalized young people in a given country requires concerted, holistic and cross-sectoral approaches in policy areas related to women, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, refugees, migrants, youth in rural areas and the economically impoverished, on the part of the ministries responsible for youth, employment, food and agriculture, housing, social affairs, public health, environment, law, transportation and social welfare.

V. Youth engagement for development through information and communications technologies

36. The reach of young people's online presence and activity is both broad and extensive. Young people around the world use new information and communications technologies and mobile devices to stay connected and become informed about issues that affect them, helping them to engage and participate in a variety of ways. In addition, young people are at the forefront in devising technological solutions to some of today's most pressing poverty-related challenges, such as gaining access to health care, education and financial literacy.

37. The ability of youth to develop and utilize online tools and forums to create spaces and respond to the needs of local and global communities has allowed them to engage in a multitude of ways and on a variety of topics at any given time. In order to leverage the innovation of young people in the quest to eradicate poverty, it is important that policymakers utilize and harness the power of information and communications technologies to better develop and implement youth policies.

38. Although many youth throughout the world are connected to the Internet, there are still many who do not have adequate access to broadband, open access to the Internet or the mobile tools and devices needed to participate. The Broadband Commission for Digital Development notes that, while 3.2 billion people (43 per cent of the global population) were connected in 2015, only 35 per cent of people in developing countries had such access. Moreover, 90 per cent of people in the least developed countries did not have access to any kind of Internet connection. Ensuring the active inclusion and involvement of unconnected youth as the connected world forges ahead remains an important challenge.[6]

VI. Role of the Commission for Social Development

39. The Commission for Social Development, a body responsible for advising the Economic and Social Council on all issues related to social policies and social development, including on the follow-up to and implementation of the Programme of Action, has an important role to play in assisting Member States in their implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals as they pertain to youth and the development, implementation and monitoring of youth policies.

[6] The Broadband Commission for Digital Development, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The State of Broadband Report 2015 (Geneva, 2015).

40. To implement the 2030 Agenda and the Goals, Governments will need to: (a) translate them into an integrated national policy framework; (b) formulate national plans, strategies and programmes based on the national policy framework; (c) identify and secure financial and technical resources; (d) to establish mechanisms for monitoring, reviewing and reporting progress; and (e) identify and build effective partnerships.

41. The Commission should continue to serve as a forum for sharing experiences in promoting people-centred and inclusive youth policy development and follow-up in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

VII. Conclusion

42. A comprehensive approach to youth policy often includes targeted efforts, as well as cross-sectoral efforts, continuous youth engagement, evidence-based approaches and links to regional and global processes and priorities. Addressing the issues and challenges faced by young people in all sectors should include a focus on gender equality, youth participation and the inclusion of marginalized groups. Such approaches to policymaking contribute to the robustness of the resulting policies and their implementation and address inequalities faced by marginalized groups.

43. To discuss and elaborate on the suggestions contained in the present note, the Commission may wish to focus on the following questions in its deliberations on emerging issues at its fifty-fifth session:

(a) What is the current state of youth development and youth policies at the global regional and national levels in the areas highlighted by the 2030 Agenda and the Programme of Action?

(b) How can youth development be used to achieve poverty eradication? What are some innovative approaches and strategies, good practices and lessons learned at the national, regional and international levels? How can these be used to address the needs of the most marginalized youth and ensure that no one is left behind?

(c) What concrete recommendations can the Commission put forth to promote sustainable youth development and successful youth policies, including evidence-informed policies, and the inclusion of youth in the policy process and in youth mainstreaming?

(d) What role do alliances and partnerships play in such initiatives?

(e) How does youth development, as a driver of poverty eradication, contribute to progress with respect to the social dimensions of sustainable development?

(f) How can information and communications technologies and new technologies be harnessed in the implementation of the Goals, in particular by and for youth, as a means of enhancing youth development outcomes?